



Congressman Dave Reichert
Washington's 8th Congressional District

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REICHERT OFFERS AMENDMENT TO HOMELAND LEGISLATION

First Homeland Security Authorization to include First Responders

WASHINGTON, DC— U.S. Rep. Dave Reichert today offered an important amendment to the Department of Homeland Security Authorization Act for FY06. The amendment, which was accepted by unanimous consent, will move to include first responders in all steps of terrorism preparedness exercises. The bill is expected to pass Committee later tonight and will be called to a vote on the House floor in the next month.

The following is Reichert's remarks to the Committee on the amendment:

Mr. Chairman, we are here today to aide the Department of Homeland Security in fulfilling their mission. This is an incredibly important bill and I'd like to thank Mr. King from New York for co-sponsoring this amendment.

I served as a law enforcement officer for 33 years, most recently as Sheriff to King County. And my tenure as a Sheriff allows me to speak to the importance of this particular amendment I offer today.

On a regular basis the Department of Homeland Security holds terrorist attack "drills," known as TOPOFF. These drills involve multiple cities running simulations of simultaneous terrorist attacks- dirty bombs, biological and chemical attacks.

The people who coordinate the would be response efforts are our first responders- firefighters, police officers and paramedics. I know that because two years ago, one of the TOPOFF drill cities was Seattle, and as King County Sheriff I participated in a "dirty bomb attack."

First responders know what we need to draw and learn from in these simulations. These are drills, but they are drills because we hope to never see the day a terrorist attack is levied on our home cities. God help us, in the case that we have to rise to that occasion, it will be these men and women on the front lines, assisting any of us who need it.

In today's world, with the new and sadly, horribly challenging threats we face, we must be proactive, not reactive. So I offer an amendment that makes First Responders part of a process to which they are already intricate.

Currently, first responders are only involved in the back end of critical terrorism preparedness drills. They offer insight and ideas at the conclusion of the drills as to what could have gone better, equipment needs and training changes that need to be made. Yet in spite of their expertise, they are not involved on the front end, when the exercises are planned.

My amendment changes that and makes consultation with first responders on federal, state and local levels during national terrorism preparedness exercises mandatory. It ensures that we are looking at this problem on the ground level, where things will happen and where the viewpoint counts.

Mr. Chairman, I have seen many things as a law enforcement officer that I never anticipated I would see. I hope and pray that I NEVER see a day where terrorists attack my home, or any of your home cities. Reality is that we must be prepared for worst case scenarios, and I don't believe in doing anything less than 100 percent. Involving first responders in terrorist drills from the beginning to end is simply the only way these preparedness exercises will be effective. I yield back the balance of my time.

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